

## LEWIS AND CLARK DID IT BEFORE MONTANA WAS MONTANA.

Up the Missouri River they sailed, past the Great Falls, on to the headwaters at Three Forks and beyond, into the high peaks. On the return trip, in 1806, Clark and a small party paddled the Yellowstone River in two dugout cottonwood trees across southern Montana. The Corps of Discovery was followed by fur trappers and explorers like Jim Bridger and John Colter, who went with the flow through the vast wilderness. Steamboats plied the Missouri and Yellowstone, opening the frontier. And for millennia before Lewis and Clark, the rivers were home to winter camps, ceremonial dances, gatherings and battles, buffalo hunts and powwows. Today, the interstates and state highways hew to the same tradition.

Stitch together the great loop made by the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers, taking side trips along the tributaries, and you cover the better part of the state. Include the Clark Fork, the Bitterroot, and the Flathead, west of the Continental Divide, and you take care of the rest. And if you fall prey to the worthy temptation of following side streams, you've got a life's worth of vacations ahead of you.



Yellowstone River, Paradise Valley, MT

TRAVELING THE ROUTES OF MONTANA'S

## FAMOUS RIVERS

Double Falls, Glacier National Park

## GUIDED BY THE YELLOWSTONE

Start in the east, along the Yellowstone River. On the outskirts of Glendive, detour into Makoshika State Park, with trails, picnic stops, bird-watching, and scenic drives. Just north of town, along Highway 16, stop in at Intake Dam, where the ancient paddlefish collect each spring and where a major fish ramp project is underway to allow passage for warm water species that have been blocked from upstream waters for a century. Stop at local rock shops and museums featuring unique Yellowstone River "moss" agates.

Continue west through a string of towns named for military men of the Indian Wars—Terry, Forsyth, Custer, Miles City. The Yellowstone bends through the broad valley, past sandstone bluffs, offering fishing access and camping spots. Each town holds nuggets of history in small museums, the possibility of summer rodeos and small town cafés. Miles City is home to the annual Bucking Horse Sale, held every spring on the third weekend of May, when the town doubles in size,

crammed with cowboys, belt buckles the size of dessert plates, horse trailers, and the buzz of competition.

Stop at Pompeys Pillar National Monument, half an hour east of Billings, where William Clark paused in July of 1806. Walk to the top of the sandstone butte and take in the wide view, much as Clark did on his way back to St. Louis. Billings, Montana's largest city, where steamboats once docked up, is home to art museums, rodeos, a busy historic downtown, and amenities that run the gamut from luxury hotels and fine dining to scenic bicycle tours and riverside camping. Visit Pictograph Cave State Park, just southeast of town, to view ancient art and artifacts, some more than 2,100 years old.

Then, check out Columbus and schedule a day of exhilarating whitewater rafting on the Stillwater River, camp at the city park, and stroll the old Main Street. To the south loom the Beartooth Mountains, pillowed with snow in the high country even in mid-summer.



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Laurel, Big Timber, the Crazy Mountains, the Boulder River–Montana unfurls in dramatic fashion on the way up the Yellowstone, full of potential for side jaunts, home-cooked meals, fishing stops, scenic floats, sheep drives, art festivals and farmer's markets. Take your time; give in to impulse. At Livingston, leave the interstate, explore a downtown dotted with art galleries, restaurants and shops, then head south towards Yellowstone National Park on Highway 89, following the upper Yellowstone River through Paradise Valley.

Enjoy a soak and a meal at Chico Hot Springs, stay at a bed and breakfast, indulge in a guided drift boat

Return to Ennis and the Madison River, or drop down to Highway 41 at Twin Bridges, near the Jefferson River, completing the trio of watersheds that make up the Missouri. Stop in for a tour at Lewis and Clark Caverns along the Jefferson, and check out the community of Three Forks, home to the recently renovated Sacajawea Hotel and Wheat Montana. From there, Highway 287 follows the valley of the Missouri, full of Lewis and Clark sites and fishing accesses. At Helena, Montana's capital, take the Last Chance Tour Trolley through downtown, view the pottery and ceramic art at the Archie Bray Foundation or enjoy a hike up one of the trails in Mt. Helena Park.



Dearborn River, Rocky Mountain Front near Augusta

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fishing trip, rent a canoe. Follow the river all the way to Gardiner, where elk and bison roam on the lawns and whitewater outfitters will take you through the big water of Yankee Jim Canyon. Before heading back north, push on a bit further, into the park near Mammoth, to the parking lot at the 45th Parallel. A short trail leads to the Boiling River, where you can soak under an open sky in the hot geothermal waters while wildlife parades past.

## MISSOURI RIVER MEANDER

Then, farther west, initiate the Missouri River exploration by heading up the Gallatin River, one of the three forks of the Missouri, along Highway 191 towards Big Sky. Raft the whitewater sections of the Gallatin, featuring the wet fun of the Mad Mile and House Rock. Dawdle in Big Sky Resort's Mountain Village for a round of golf, mountain-bike trails or a wild ride on the Twin Zip zipline. Top it off with exquisite dining at historic Lone Mountain Ranch. Farther south, drive the edge of Yellowstone National Park to West Yellowstone, one of Yellowstone's gateway communities, where wildlife parks, IMAX theaters, outfitters and lodging are all waiting.

Continue the headwaters theme by driving the Madison Valley on Highway 287, past Hebgen Lake, where the dramatic 1959 earthquake dammed the river. The Madison Valley teems with elk herds, broad vistas, ranch land and great fishing. From Ennis, a side trip to the former Territorial Capital of Virginia City treats you to a dose of Montana gold-rush, vigilante history and theater.

North of Helena, just off of Interstate 15, the dramatic Gates of the Mountains is worth a detour, and perhaps a boat tour. Lewis and Clark extolled the craggy beauty of this spot, also the site of the tragic Mann Gulch Fire, which killed 13 firefighters in August of 1949 and provided the material for Norman McLean's book, *Young Men and Fire*.

The scenery expands on the way to Great Falls. Tributaries like the Dearborn and Smith flow in to the Missouri, each with floating opportunities, fishing and backroads charm. Long swells of prairie, river canyons, distant buttes and mountain ranges rumple the view before Great Falls comes into focus.

In Great Falls, make time to tour the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, on the banks of the Missouri. Walk or bike the paved trails that wind through town and along the river. Don't leave before you walk through the C. M. Russell Museum, the world's most complete collection of Charlie Russell art and artifacts.

Just downstream of Great Falls, on Highway 87, the community of Fort Benton is steeped in river history. In the frontier decades, steamboats offloaded here onto wagons. "Wood hawks" and gold miners mingled on the banks, and commerce bustled in this once thriving town, which still offers upscale hotels and restaurants. If a canoe trip is on the radar, contact an outfitter or rent canoes to float the Wild and Scenic Missouri River. The currents are mild, the scenery of White Cliffs and Hole in



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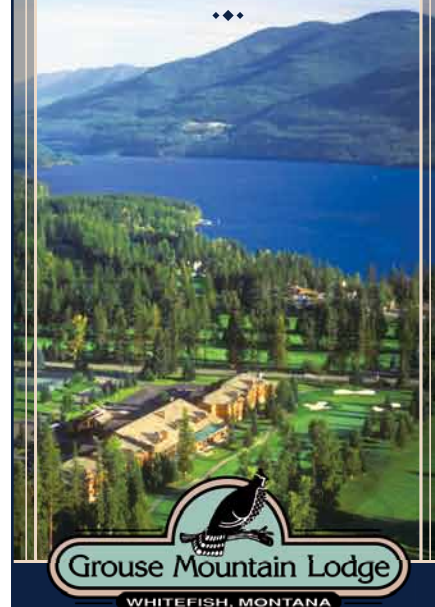
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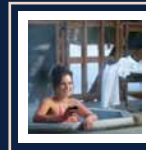


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Clark Fork, near Plains, MT

the Wall stunning, and the river corridor remains much as Lewis and Clark experienced it. In fact, you can camp in the same campsites they did on your way down to Judith Crossing or spend a week going all the way to Fred Robinson Bridge on Highway 191.

Strike north to Highway 2 and follow the Milk River across to Glasgow, where the road rejoins the Missouri River. Outside of Malta, visit the Great Plains Dinosaur Museum and Field Station, one of the stops along Montana's Dinosaur Trail. Drive the loop road through Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge for some great birding. In Glasgow, tour the nearby Fort Peck Dam and stop in at the local museum.

**WATERS WEST OF THE CONTINENTAL DIVIDE**  
The Yellowstone and Missouri form a vast horseshoe of Montana experiences, but don't neglect the rivers west of the Continental Divide. Take the Clark Fork, for example, which runs through downtown Missoula within blocks of book stores, historic theaters, and the University of Montana campus. Some of the best whitewater in Montana lies in Alberton Gorge on the Clark Fork or on sections of the Blackfoot River, northeast of Missoula.

Follow Highway 93 south of Missoula, back into Lewis and Clark terrain along the Bitterroot Valley. Follow the Corps of Discovery expedition route up to Lolo Pass, enjoy a canoe float on the Bitterroot or stop in for a meal in Hamilton before an evening of theater, courtesy of The Hamilton Players.

Then again, turn north from Missoula on Highway 93 and head for the Flathead country. Keep an eye out for Indian fairs in St. Ignatius, stop off in Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge and the National Bison Range or find one of many

trails to hike into the Mission Mountains. Go for a sail on Flathead Lake, the largest natural body of fresh water in the western United States and enjoy mouth-watering cherries near Polson. Just to the north, Kalispell and Whitefish beckon.

Overnight at Grouse Mountain Lodge in Whitefish, making sure to stroll Central Avenue, where the selection of coffee shops, stores and restaurants tempt you. Time your visit to coincide with the annual Huckleberry Days Arts Festival, held each August. Every summer on Tuesday evenings, the Whitefish Farmer's Market showcases local produce and crafts. Outside of town, take on the whitewater on the Middle Fork of the Flathead River. Top it off with a drive up Glacier National Park's historic Going-to-the-Sun Highway, just down the road on Highway 2.

Pick up some good Montana reads, or listen to them as you drive:

- + *The Big Sky*, A.B. Guthrie
- + *Undaunted Courage*, Stephen Ambrose
- + *Winter Wheat*, Mildred Walker
- + *This House of Sky*, Ivan Doig
- + *A River Runs Through It*, Norman McLean
- + *Bad Land*, Jonathan Raban
- + *Fool's Crow*, James Welch

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